



February 24, 2022

Public Hearing on:

House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023

(Department of Developmental Services)

Good afternoon/evening, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Joyce Lewis, the Executive Vice President of Key Human Services, Inc, a statewide organization providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Our agency is based in Wethersfield and I live in South Windsor. Key provides a combination of community based individual and residential supports in 40+ towns and all 8 counties in CT as a provider for DDS, DCF and DSS.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the state budget and its impact on the work that we do. I want to thank you for your support to provide a living wage to our staff and to invest in the future of non profits. The crisis continues, so I ask you to continue your commitment to our work with additional funding this year.

It has been another year filled with unexpected challenges arising at every turn ranging from fiscal shortfalls; to pandemic surges; to a catastrophic staff shortage. Let me give you a window into our world ...

The beginning of the fiscal year brought a significant wage increase for our DSPs, wonderful news, right? Right! But the funding is so specific that some staff received 10% raises while staff that have been committed to the individuals for 20 years received 3%. What message does that send to our staff? Wage compression is real and devalues the dedicated work of so many amazing people.

Last year's funding was not in the form of a COLA and did not allow us to address long unfunded issues in the agency. Please consider a COLA for DDS providers with the wage funding this year.

Staff Shortages are everywhere and wow, we can relate. The intensity of our staff shortages are in the cataclysmic range. Our agency has a 25% vacancy rate and has had for months on end. What service providers are experiencing threatens the health and safety of the individuals we support as well as our

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staff. Every day is a struggle to meet staffing needs, every day people work 16 hours for the who knows how many day in a row, every day staff get frozen in, managers get called in, people scramble to cover shifts. The people we support get less attention, less activities and less connection with their community because there aren't enough staff, because the staff are exhausted, because it is beyond a catastrophic shortage. Overtime is outrageous. Individuals are home for times that we are not funded for whether due to day program closures or quarantines or due to their own exposures or illness. Over the last year, inflation rose by almost six percent, surpassing the COLA in the current year's budget. Costs are through the roof!

Too much and yet, there was more! Surges of Covid swept through our agency with 20-30 staff out per week while whole houses experienced Omicron affecting both staff and individuals, reminiscent of Delta last December and January.

Please take action to support the nonprofits that are underfunded, overwhelmed and hanging on by a thread:

- Increase funding by the additional 8% for FY23
- Please support Governor Lamont's proposals from the American Rescue Plan Act for DDS:
 - \$5 million in FY23 for infrastructure improvements for public and privately-owned camps.
 - \$5 million in FY23 to provide additional recreational and leisure opportunities to facilitate socialization and connections as the state emerges from the pandemic.

Thank you for all you do and for your time and consideration today

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